

Set Piece Battle

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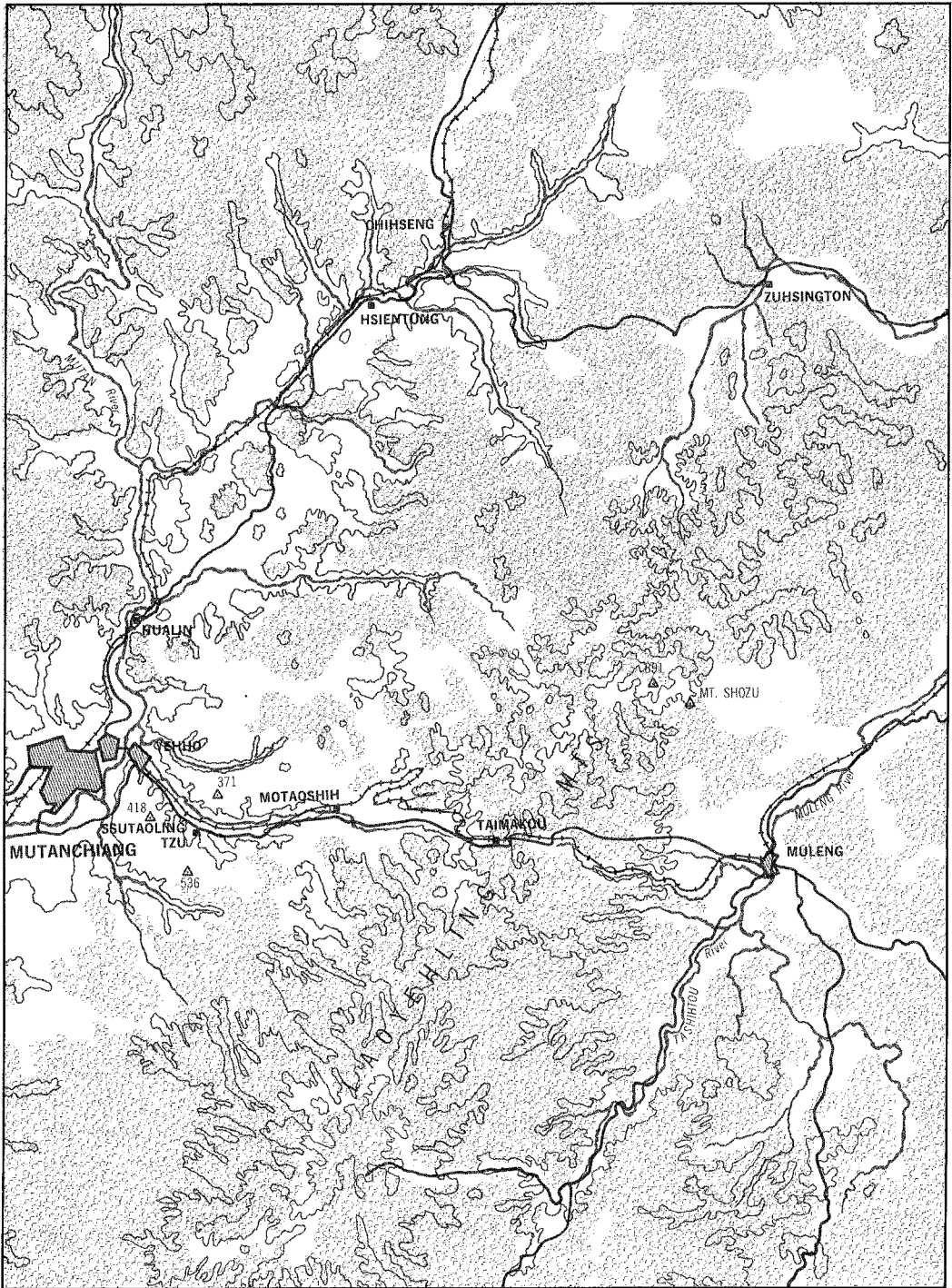


The Setting

The rapid and successful Soviet penetration of Japanese defenses in eastern Manchuria did not necessarily seal the fate of the defending Japanese forces. What ultimately decided the issue was the battle of Mutanchiang, one of the few set piece battles fought during the Soviet Manchurian offensive. The battle of Mutanchiang was a series of engagements from 12 to 16 August conducted on two axes converging on the city of Mutanchiang and culminating with the Soviet seizure of the city.

That Mutanchiang was a major objective of Soviet forces was natural. Not only was the city built astride the main road and rail line running into central Manchuria from the east, but it was also headquarters for the Japanese First Area Army. In addition, the 5th Army Headquarters was nearby at Yehho, across the Mutan River from Mutanchiang. Mutanchiang itself occupied a strategic location on the west bank of the Mutan River at the junction of roads leading westward from Suifenhö and Muleng, southwest from Pamientung, and south from Linkou (see map 4—1). Any withdrawal of Japanese forces in eastern Manchuria from Jaoho to Suifenhö had to pass through the city. East of Mutanchiang, the Laoyehling Mountains rose to heights of from 700 to almost 1,100 meters. Running due north and south, this mountain range, which any enemy force would have to cross, provided the city a protective barrier.

The Japanese realized the strategic significance of Mutanchiang. In their original plans they had anchored their defenses on the mountains east of the city. Behind the first two defensive lines on the border and at the Muleng River, the Japanese 5th Army had constructed a third line (the main line of resistance) along the crests of the Laoyehling Mountains. Here, the three forward Japanese divisions (135th, 126th, and 124th Infantry Divisions) had prepared field fortifications and had garrisoned a large segment of their forces nearby. The actual defensive line extended from the Mutan River north of Hualin, eastward past Chihhsing (135th Infantry Division sector) to Tzuhsingtun (126th Infantry Division sector), and south along the crest of the mountains to a point fifteen kilometers south of the



Map 4—1. The Approaches to Mutanchiang

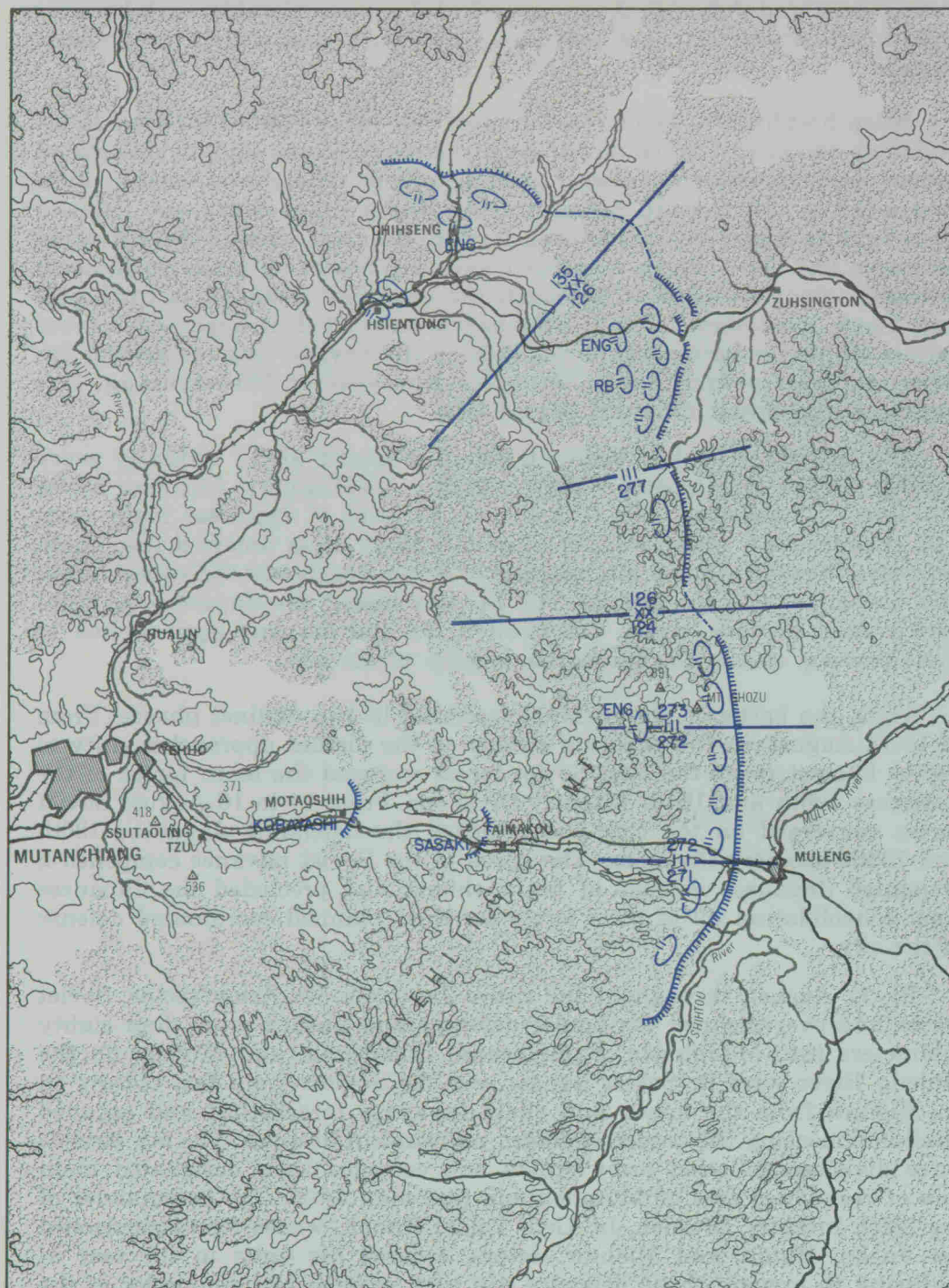
Muleng to Mutanchiang road (124th Infantry Division sector). Although during June and July, 5th Army units had done considerable work building field fortifications at these locations, that work was still in progress in August.

When hostilities broke out on 9 August, 5th Army ordered its subordinate divisions to occupy those newly constructed positions and to prepare to defend them in accordance with existing plans.¹ Those contingency plans envisioned a stiff forward defense of the border fortified regions, followed by a fighting withdrawal of division forward elements back to the 5th Army defensive line. The plan presupposed that any Soviet advance would occur primarily along avenues of approach the Japanese assessed as trafficable and, hence, most likely to be used by any invader. If their hypothesis proved correct, Japanese forward units could delay the Soviets long enough for 5th Army to erect a formidable defensive line east of Mutanchiang. The Japanese hypothesis, however, proved false.

The Soviets launched their attack in strength along virtually every possible avenue of approach, without regard to trafficability. Japanese border garrisons fell quickly, and the hasty withdrawal of Japanese main units was chaotic. As a result, the Japanese 5th Army units occupied their main defensive lines literally in the presence of advancing Soviet forces and never had the chance to reorganize. The Soviets forced the Japanese to fight continuous battles along the border, on the distant approaches to Mutanchiang, and in the immediate vicinity of the city.

Thus, the battle of Mutanchiang occurred in two distinct phases. From 12 to 14 August, in two separate sectors on the distant approaches (fifty to eighty kilometers) to the city, Soviet forces engaged the main forces of the Japanese 126th and 124th Infantry Divisions. From 14 to 16 August Soviet forces converged on the city and attacked the defending Japanese 126th and 135th Infantry Divisions. The speed of the Soviet advance compelled a disjointed Japanese defense of Mutanchiang and precluded the Japanese from consolidating all of their forces for their planned coordinated defense of the city.

By 11 August, throughout the entire Japanese 5th Army sector, Soviet forces had overwhelmed the border defenses and pushed more than eighty kilometers into Manchuria. Pamientung, Lishuchen, and Muleng on the Muleng River were in Soviet hands, and the Soviets were fast closing in on Mishan from the south and east. Japanese forces that had escaped annihilation along the border streamed rearward in disorder. The 5th Army's three divisions followed army orders and occupied their designated main line of resistance east of Mutanchiang (see map 4—2). The commander of the 135th Infantry Division, Lt. Gen. Yoichi Hitomi, whose forces garrisoned the Jaoho, Hutou, and Mishan sectors, ordered his units in the rear at Chihsing to prepare those defenses. He then ordered the remainder of the division at Linkou, Tungan, and Hulin to withdraw as quickly as possible to Chihsing.²



Map 4—2. Japanese Defenses of Mutanchiang, 9 August 1945

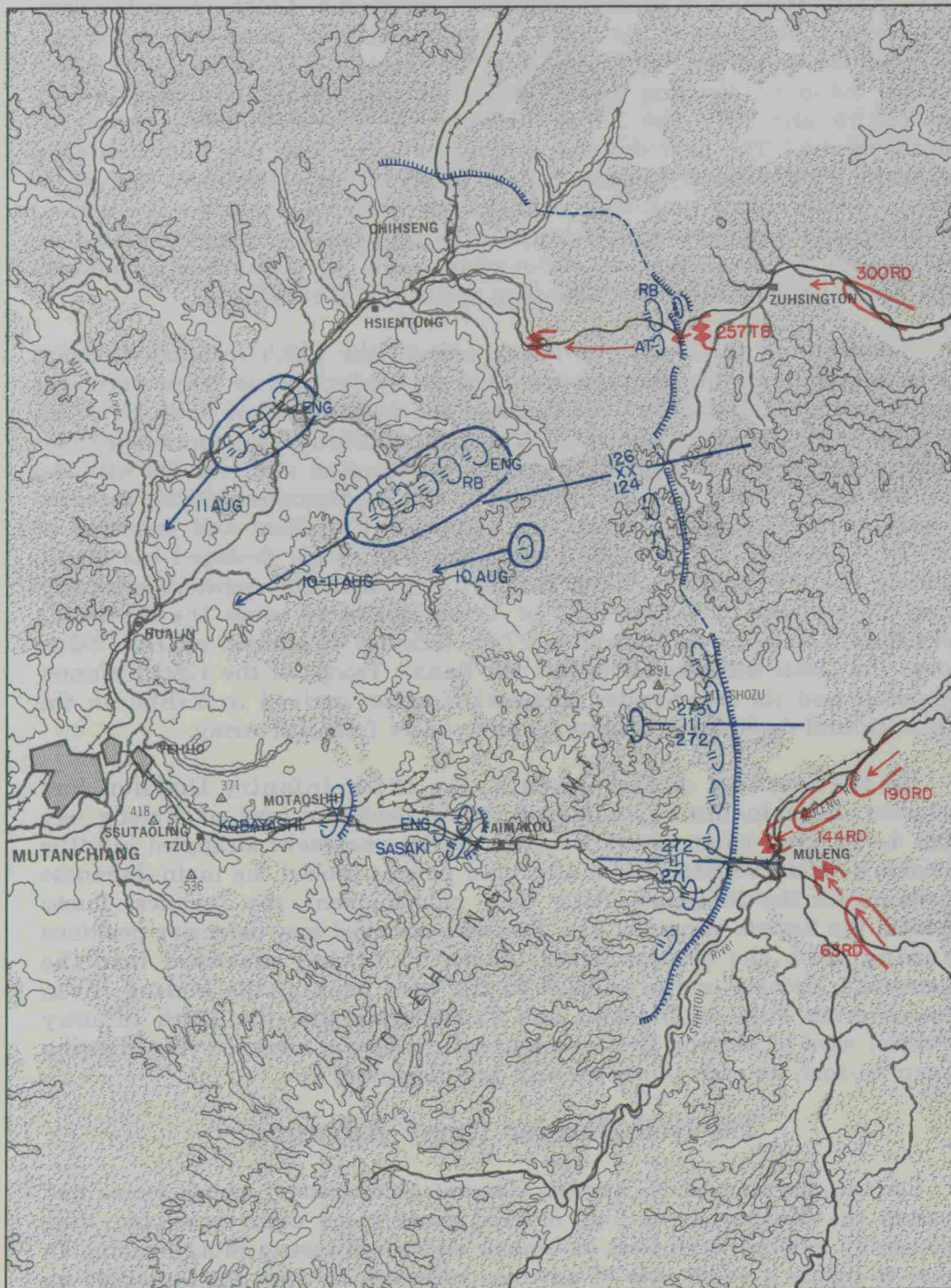
A battalion of the 370th Infantry Regiment and a Manchurian battalion were left at Mashan to defend high-speed routes into Linkou from the east. Similarly, a battalion of the 369th Infantry Regiment remained at Tungan to cover the Japanese withdrawal. On the evening of 10 August, 5th Army revised the order, directing that 135th Infantry Division units instead deploy at Yehho and join the 126th Infantry Division in the defense of Mutanchiang.³ The next day the raiding battalion and one battalion each from the 368th Infantry Regiment and 370th Infantry Regiment arrived at Yehho and occupied defensive positions northwest of the city. The arrival of additional withdrawing 135th Infantry Division units was expected on the twelfth. In short, because of Soviet pressure, 5th Army had abandoned any idea of defending in the Chihsing main line of resistance.

Likewise, on the tenth, 5th Army ordered the 126th Infantry Division to withdraw from the Pamientung area to Yehho, but to leave sufficient forces in the Tzuhsingtun area to cover the withdrawal of both the 126th and the 135th Infantry Divisions.⁴ The 126th Infantry Division commander ordered Lieutenant Yamagishi to defend Tzuhsingtun and Hill 792 with the 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment; the 3d Battalion, 277th Infantry Regiment; one company of the 31st Antitank Battalion; and one-third of the 1st Company of the raiding battalion. Yamagishi deployed his forces, placing the 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment, the antitank company, and the raiding battalion west of Tzuhsingtun to cover the division's withdrawal and the 3d Battalion, 277th Infantry Regiment, on Hill 792 to cover the 124th Infantry Division's left flank.⁵ Troops of the 126th Infantry Division and its commander, General Nomizo, arrived in Yehho on the eleventh and deployed according to new orders from 5th Army.

By the morning of the eleventh, the 124th Infantry Division had occupied its main line of resistance (MLR) positions west of Muleng (see map 4—3). Even as survivors from the Soviet onslaught straggled into the division's defensive line, Soviet advanced patrols probed the main Japanese positions for the first time. After their redeployment, the Japanese forces awaited the Soviets' advance. The Japanese occupied new defensive positions running from the Mutan River, north of Yehho, eastward into the mountains, arching south, parallel to the west bank of the Muleng River. The covering units at Mashan and Tzuhsingtun and the 124th Infantry Division west of Muleng first encountered the Soviet advance. The fighting began as soon as each Japanese unit had deployed.

1st Red Banner Army Advance

On the morning of 11 August, General Beloborodov, whose forces had secured the Muleng River line, ordered those same units to exploit their success by moving northwest to Linkou and southwest to Mutanchiang. In order to insure a rapid rate of advance sufficient to deny the Japanese an opportunity to regroup and to establish a firm defense, a forward detachment that would lead each rifle corps advance formed around the tank



Map 4—3. Situation, 11 August

brigades attached to the army. Hence, Lt. Col. L. D. Krupetskoi's 75th Tank Brigade spearheaded the 59th Rifle Corps advance, while the 257th Tank Brigade led the march of 26th Rifle Corps. By the afternoon of 11 August, the tank brigades had crossed the Muleng River and plunged deep into the Japanese rear areas. Lead rifle divisions prepared to follow the forward detachments in march column. Other army units would follow after they had completed passage of the makeshift corduroy roads, now thoroughly ground up by traffic through the Border Mountains.

The 75th Tank Brigade, reinforced by an automatic weapons company of the 254th Rifle Regiment mounted on the tanks and self-propelled guns, marched from Lishuchen toward Linkou via Mashan. The 39th Rifle Division trailed behind. General Beloborodov specifically ordered the tank brigade to cut the rail line at Linkou in order to isolate remaining elements of the Japanese 135th Infantry Division, which were then withdrawing by rail from the Mishan area.⁶ At 0600 on 12 August, the 75th Tank Brigade, while approaching Mashan, encountered a Japanese battalion of the 370th Infantry Regiment and a Manchurian battalion in defensive positions behind the Hsia Muleng Ho. Although heavy rains had swollen the river and flooded its banks, the bridge across seemed to be intact. As the lead tank attempted to cross the bridge, both bridge and tank exploded, victims of Japanese mines. The tank brigade laid down heavy suppressive fire on Japanese positions while sappers worked frantically to repair the bridge. At this time, the 39th Rifle Division commander, Maj. Gen. V. A. Semenov, arrived at Mashan to supervise operations against the Japanese force.⁷

In order to avoid being outflanked, the Japanese forces had occupied positions on the north bank of the river overlooking the bridge. Dug in on the southern slope of a series of hills one kilometer northeast of Mashan Station, other Japanese troops were able to cover the left flank of the main defensive position. At 1100 on 12 August, under cover of artillery fire, the Soviet 75th Tank Brigade moved to new positions in order to engage the Japanese left. Two hours later a battalion of the 50th Rifle Regiment, 39th Rifle Division, with support from the tank brigade, routed the Japanese in the hills east of Mashan. At 1800 the 1st Battalion, 50th Rifle Regiment, and the 75th Tank Brigade intercepted, surrounded, and destroyed a Japanese battalion withdrawing west along the railroad to Mashan.

The battle for Mashan continued into the evening, when Japanese forces counterattacked the Soviets, only to be driven off in the direction of Tutao. Meanwhile, the 254th Rifle Regiment, having completed repair of the bridge across the Hsia Muleng Ho, crossed the river and drove off the remaining Japanese defenders. Having cleared the Linkou road of Japanese covering units, the 75th Tank Brigade moved on Linkou, with the 39th Rifle Division bringing up the rear. At 0700 on 13 August, the lead elements of the 75th Tank Brigade entered Linkou, and several hours later the remainder of the brigade and the 39th Rifle Division followed. The Japanese defenders had burned important buildings in the city and had left behind small suicide

squads (in Russian *smertniks*) to harass the Soviets. Most of the Japanese defenders withdrew southward toward Mutanchiang and northward into the mountains.⁸

The Japanese, according to General Beloborodov, left covering forces on routes they considered likely for the Soviet advance from Linkou. "On the routes of withdrawal—groups of *smertniks*, which day and night fired on the columns of our forces, perpetrated diversionary acts and fell upon our rear and transport units."⁹ Heavy rains also hindered Soviet operations.

The situation became more complicated when the only road to Mutanchiang, crossing forested mountain regions, was broken up and washed away by continuous rains. Movement of auto transport was hampered. By-passes and corduroy sections of road had to be built in many sectors.¹⁰

The absence of trafficable routes ruled out parallel pursuit of the Japanese and, on the thirteenth, dictated that the 59th Rifle Corps forces continue the march southward toward Mutanchiang in a single, long column led by a forward detachment.

While the 59th Rifle Corps secured Linkou, the 26th Rifle Corps's 257th Tank Brigade moved westward from Pamientung toward the railroad station of Hsientung. The tank brigade's mission was to overcome enemy opposition and reach Mutanchiang by the evening of 12 August (see map 4—4). At Tzuhsingtun the tank brigade met Lieutenant Yamagishi's battalion of the 279th Infantry Regiment, reinforced by a company of antitank guns posted on a hill overlooking the road. Japanese accounts relate their unsuccessful attempt to halt the Soviet tanks, which, after a one-hour fight, bypassed their position and headed westward.¹¹ In fact, the Japanese antitank and infantry took their toll on Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik's tank brigade. According to a detailed Soviet account:

Having crossed a ravine, the tanks neared Koutsykho [Tzuhsingtun]. The road widened somewhat, but nevertheless only two machines could pass through side by side, almost joined together. We could clearly see wooden peasant huts when explosions began to sound. Japanese antitank guns opened fire from the heights. The column stopped to return the fire. Finding detours, the tankers penetrated into the depth of the strongpoint and battle boiled. On the heights; among the tangle of trenches, pillboxes, dugouts, and artillery positions; over the precipices; and before the inaccessible grades bellowed tank motors; Japanese guns often struck, and the grass huts and grass blazed. The battle lasted for more than an hour, perhaps the bloodiest since the beginning of combat. Finally the enemy faltered, hundreds of his retreating soldiers littered the slopes of the hills and valley of marshy streams. The tanks . . . pursued the fugitives. The victory was achieved at a dear price. Senior Lieutenant Dmitriev and Lieutenant Bezrukov, reconnaissance platoon leader Demin and Sergeant Zotov of the automatic weapons company died heroes' deaths. Many received serious wounds.¹²

This fighting and the arduous road march combined to reduce significantly the tank strength of the brigade from its original full TO&E authorization of sixty-five tanks. After the battle, the brigade raced on toward Hsientung.



Tanks and infantry in an assault

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Yamagishi regrouped his forces on the heights to await the arrival of the main Soviet infantry force. At 1000 on 12 August, advanced elements of the 300th Rifle Division approached the Japanese positions, and the lead regiment of the division deployed under artillery cover. At noon, heavy artillery fire was falling on Lieutenant Yamagishi's hilltop position north of the road. Shortly thereafter, Soviet troops tried to flank the position on the north, but Yamagishi stopped this maneuver by moving his forces from the hills south of the road to the right flank of his position, then north of the road. The Soviets immediately shifted their artillery fires to this sector and forced Yamagishi to withdraw his forces to the western slopes of the hills for protection. At nightfall, Soviet infantry controlled the left rear of the Japanese positions and both hills north of the road were in the hands of the 300th Rifle Division. All Japanese counterattacks to regain the hills during the evening of the twelfth failed.

Outflanked and in danger of encirclement, the Japanese withdrew into the forests south of the road before daybreak on the thirteenth. They had lost 400 of 650 men, four antitank guns, two battalion guns, and three machine guns.¹³ The next day Lieutenant Yamagishi's small force marched across the mountains southwest to Mutanchiang. Two days later it arrived northeast of Yehho, only to find Mutanchiang invested by Soviet forces. The detachment headed toward Tungchingching, where it finally surrendered to the Soviets on the twentieth. After smashing Japanese positions at Tzuhsingtun, the 300th Rifle Division pushed on toward Hsientung, with the 22d Rifle Division stretched out behind it on the road from Pamientung.

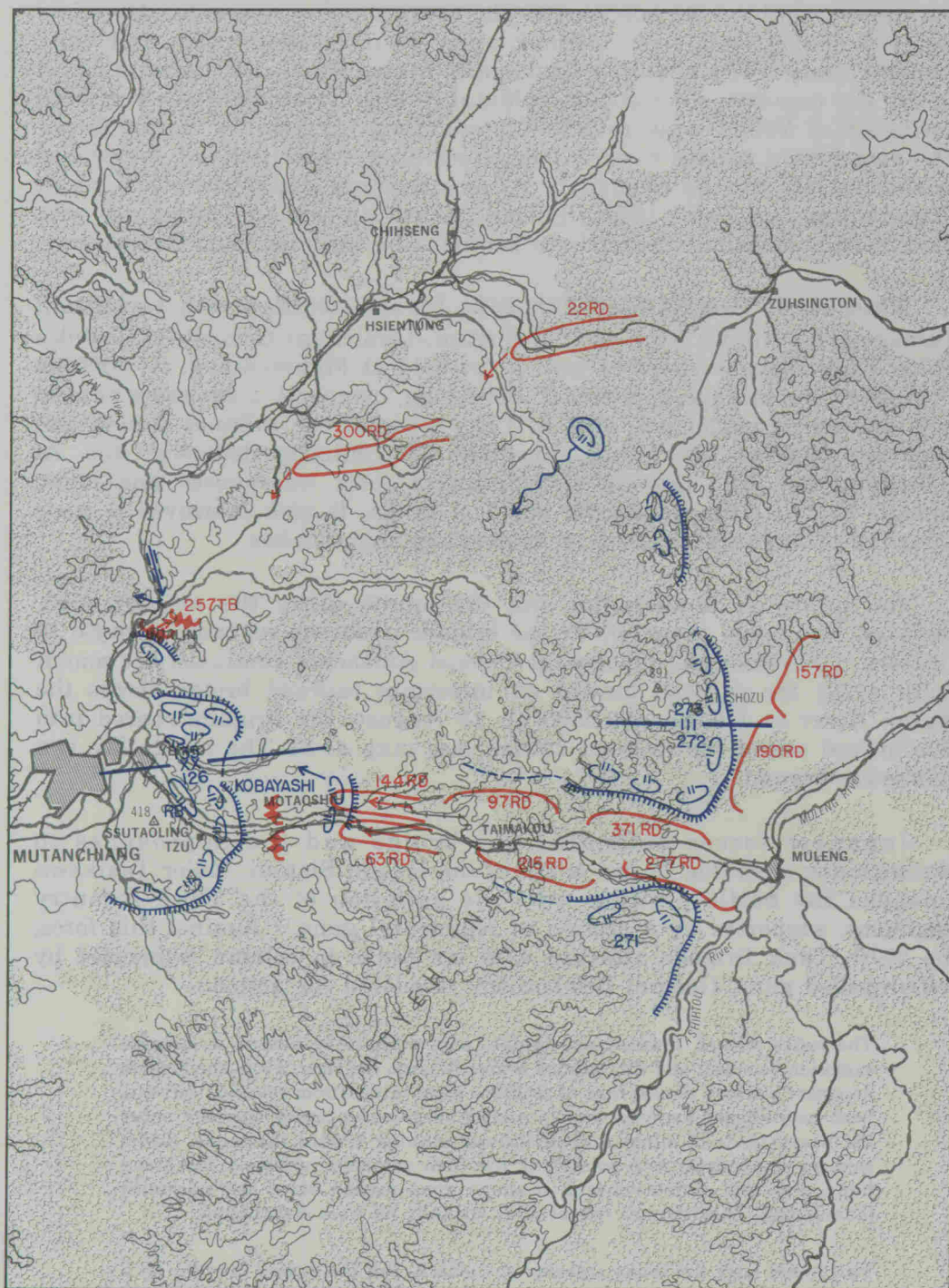
While on 12 August the 300th Rifle Division battled with Lieutenant Yamagishi's covering force at Tzuhsingtun, Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik's 257th Tank Brigade raced to gain a foothold at Mutanchiang. At 0900 on 12 August, the brigade approached Hsientung, overcame a Japanese outpost in a one-hour engagement, and, at 1900, occupied the railroad station and Japanese logistics depot that supported the Chihsing defensive line. At Hsientung the tank brigade also destroyed forty warehouses and found enough fuel to refill its almost dry fuel tanks. It also destroyed a troop train full of Japanese soldiers en route south from Linkou.

The battle at Tzuhsingtun and the march along the marshy road, however, had taken their toll on the brigade, reducing its tank strength to nineteen.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik continued his march south along the railroad toward an important railroad bridge across the Mutan River at Hualin. At 0500 on 13 August, the brigade roared into Hualin and seized the railroad station (see map 4—5). The bridge lay two kilometers beyond.

Japanese forces defending the bridge and the approaches to Mutanchiang were dug in just south of the Hualin Station. Major Takikawa defended the battle position with one battalion of the 370th Infantry Regiment, supported by a section of regimental guns.¹⁵ Against this force, the 257th Tank Brigade attacked with ten tanks in column, supported by self-propelled guns. General Beloborodov recounted the action:

The tanks rushed towards the bridge, and, when they neared it, a large explosion sounded; and the railroad bridge fell into the river. From the heights Japanese artillery struck, tens of machine guns rattled from roadside culverts, from camouflaged foxholes rose up soldiers in greenish tunics, stooping under the heavy loads of mines and explosives, running toward the tanks. Soviet soldiers struck them with pointblank fire from automatic weapons, and flung hand grenades. Bursts of tank machine guns mowed down the *smertniks* [kamikazes]. They did not retreat until virtually all were slaughtered.

Two hours later the tanks repeated the attack. But the enemy brought up a new detachment of *smertniks* supported by artillery. Attempts by sappers to clear new paths through the minefields were unsuccessful, one could not approach them because of the brutal fire.¹⁶



Map 4—5. Situation, 13 August

The Japanese frustration over their inability to destroy the Soviet T-34* tanks in the engagement is recalled in this account:

Our artillery laid fire on the enemy tanks in the rear in order to obstruct the repair of tanks (while our close quarter teams attacked the tanks from the roadside). However even though the enemy tanks were hit, since the projectiles were not armor piercing, the actual damage was practically nil. . . . The enemy calmly repaired his tanks on a spot exposed to us. His behavior was arrogant and insolent in the face of our impotence. His tanks remained along the road in column, and avoided the swampy ground nearby. Some of the tank crews were observed to consist of female as well as male soldiers.¹⁷

At 1800 Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik again ordered his tanks into Hualin, where they occupied a defensive line in a settlement by the station. By mid-evening the tank brigade clearly could not hold the station against Japanese pressure, so it withdrew under heavy fire to a hill a kilometer north of Hualin and established defensive positions along the steep banks of a stream leading to the Mutan River. The sharp encounter at Hualin reduced the tank strength of the 257th Tank Brigade to seven tanks.¹⁸

Although they halted the 257th Tank Brigade, the Japanese suffered a major tactical reverse in the process. On the morning of the thirteenth, General Hitomi, the 135th Infantry Division commander, entrained at Linkou for Mutanchiang with elements of the 370th Infantry Regiment and a battalion of the 20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment. Aware of Soviet troops in the region, the general planned to fight his way through them, if necessary. At 2010 the trains arrived in Hualin to find the railroad bridge blown up in accordance with First Area Army orders. Simultaneously, the 257th Tank Brigade attacked the trains, destroying them and many of the Japanese troops aboard. The effect of the attack is evident from Japanese sources:

Our troops quickly got off the train and endeavored to engage the tanks, but were thrown into great confusion. Some were killed by tank shells, some sought cover in the forest, and others jumped into the Mutanchiang River and attempted to swim across it. General Hitomi, accompanied by some of his officers and men, narrowly escaped danger and took shelter in a mountain side along the right bank of the river.¹⁹

Hitomi later made his way to Mutanchiang, where he assumed command of the shattered remnants of his division. In the attack on the trains, the Soviets claimed to have killed 900 Japanese soldiers and destroyed six locomotives, twenty-four guns, thirty vehicles, thirty train cars with ammunition, 800 rifles, and 100 machine guns.²⁰

*Reminiscent of U.S. Task Force Smith's problems in the opening phases of the Korean War.

After midnight, Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik, with his brigade reduced to seven tanks, awaited reinforcements that would enable his depleted forces to resume the attack. Reinforcements arrived the next morning. The 300th Rifle Division and 22d Rifle Division, strung out along the muddy road from Pamientung, dispatched two self-propelled artillery battalions (twenty-five guns) and drove their infantry mercilessly to link up with the hard pressed tank brigade.²¹ From the north, the 59th Rifle Corps ordered the 75th Tank Brigade to move south along the railroad from Linkou to Hualin. After the tank brigade had overcome small Japanese units at Chushan and Santoa-hetsi (thirty-five kilometers north of Hualin), only the deteriorated, rain-soaked roads hindered the brigade's progress. By morning, 1st Red Banner Army would have sufficient forces at Hualin to conduct a major assault on the Japanese defensive lines covering the northern approaches to Mutanchiang proper.



5th Army forces on the road to Mutanchiang

5th Army Advance

From 12 to 14 August, as the 1st Red Banner Army swept forward from Pamientung and Lishuchen through Linkou and Tzuhsingtun to Hualin, the Soviet 5th Army attacked the Japanese 124th Infantry Division east of Mutanchiang. General Shiina's defensive position on a twenty-five-kilometer front extended from north to south in the mountains west of the Muleng River. The 273d Infantry Regiment, minus one battalion, and the 272d Infantry Regiment, minus one company, defended the sixteen-kilometer sector north of the Muleng-Mutanchiang road (the northern and central defensive sectors, respectively). The 271st Infantry Regiment, minus one battalion, defended the remaining eight-kilometer sector (southern defensive

sector) south of the road. A battalion of division artillery supported each of the infantry regiments, while a battery of the 1st Independent Heavy Artillery and the 20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment, minus two batteries, gave support from positions in the rear of the central sector (see map 4—3).²²

In order to reinforce the critical sector defending the road from Muleng to Mutanchiang, the 5th Army commander created a special detachment under Colonel Sasaki, commander of the 1st Engineer Command, and attached it to the 124th Infantry Division. The Sasaki detachment, consisting of the 1st Battalion, 368th Infantry Regiment, and 1st Battalion, 370th Infantry Regiment, from the 135th Infantry Division, deployed along the road east of Taimakou to intercept the advancing Soviet mechanized units.²³ On the evening of the eleventh, General Shiina moved his headquarters to Mount Shozu, behind the central sector unit, in order to coordinate the impending action. Japanese intelligence reports that evening estimated the opposing Soviet force at two divisions, composed chiefly of mechanized units, with more reinforcements approaching from Suifenho.

That Japanese assessment was accurate. On the night of 11—12 August, forward elements of the 97th and 144th Rifle Divisions, led by tank brigades, crossed the Muleng River and secured the town of Muleng. Behind them the 215th, 190th, and 371st Rifle Divisions followed in column along the road from Hsiachengtsu to Muleng, with the 363d Rifle Division approaching Muleng from the southwest. The remainder of 5th Army stretched out in long march column formation from Machiacho Station to Suiyang.

Marshal Meretskov, anxious to speed the movement of General Krylov's army to Mutanchiang, ordered Krylov to assemble a "strong" army forward detachment to advance straight down the road to Mutanchiang and rupture the Japanese defenses in one blow. Krylov designated the 76th Tank Brigade as the forward detachment; it was reinforced by the 478th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment and two rifle battalions with automatic weapons.²⁴

At dawn on the twelfth, while Soviet artillery pounded Japanese positions north and south of the road, the 76th Tank Brigade launched its attack against the right flank of the Japanese 272d Infantry Regiment in the central sector (see map 4—4). Japanese heavy and medium artillery halted Soviet infantry supporting the advance of the 76th Tank Brigade. The tank brigade itself met very heavy resistance near Plivuchi Station, where the Japanese 272d Infantry Regiment had launched battalion-size counterattacks supported by artillery, mortars, and artillery fired from two armored trains. The 76th Tank Brigade repelled the counterattack, but could not move forward. In order to restore the momentum of the attack, General Krylov reinforced the tank brigade with the 785th Rifle Regiment of the 144th Rifle Division and two battalions of the 233d Rifle Regiment of the 97th Rifle Division, as well as with additional tanks and self-propelled guns. Following a thirty-minute artillery preparation, the Soviets finally broke through the

Japanese defenses on a four-kilometer sector and then continued their advance to the outskirts of Taimakou.²⁵ All day the fighting raged: Japanese artillery pounded the narrow Soviet penetration corridor, and continual infantry counterattacks tried to seal the Soviet breakthrough.

With the central defensive sector broken and Soviet forces approaching Taimakou, the Japanese 5th Army commander formed yet another stopgap unit. This time a 1,000-man battalion, composed of students from the Reserve Officers Candidate Training Unit at Shitou and the Intendance Reserve Officers Candidate Training Unit, and one battery of the 20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment were placed under Colonel Kobayashi, commander of the 3d Field Fortification Unit, and positioned at Motaoshih in order to block the road to Mutanchiang.²⁶ By the evening of the twelfth, Soviet forces of the reinforced 76th Tank Brigade, which had overcome the Sasaki detachment at Taimakou and had reached Motaoshih, engaged Kobayashi's ersatz detachment.

Japanese 5th Army postwar accounts downplay the effectiveness of all Japanese resistance and regard the 124th Infantry Division positions as irrevocably split asunder on the twelfth. The 124th Infantry Division accounts, however, credit the division with greater success, particularly for the defense of the main road to Mutanchiang. Soviet versions confirm the success of the Russian drive along the road, but also verify 124th Infantry Division claims of heavy resistance and bitter fighting as Soviet units beat off desperate Japanese counterattacks.²⁷

Throughout 13 August Soviet forces engaged in heavy fighting (see map 4—5). The 63d and the 144th Rifle Divisions, led by tanks and self-propelled guns, widened the initial breakthrough corridor along the road to five to seven kilometers. They also penetrated to a depth of thirty kilometers, despite constant Japanese counterattacks from platoon to battalion strength and constant shellfire from Japanese artillery and mortar batteries. During the course of this fighting, Colonel Kobayashi was killed, and by 1200 on 13 August his detachment had been destroyed. Some survivors of the Japanese unit retreated to defenses east of Yehho, while others stayed behind to conduct guerrilla warfare in the Soviet rear areas.²⁸ By nightfall on the thirteenth, lead Soviet elements had secured the pass across the Laoyehling Mountains and confronted the main Japanese defensive lines east of Yehho.

As Soviet units overran the center of the Japanese 124th Infantry Division defenses, the remainder of the division struggled to maintain its defenses. By 0900 on 13 August, General Shiina received a report from his central sector unit stating, "Because of the difficulty of holding our positions, the regiment will launch a counterattack with regimental colors in the lead. This is perhaps the last report from our regiment [272d] to the division."²⁹

General Shiina responded by ordering the regiment to fight to the death. Because his other sectors were not, as yet, hard pressed, he also rejected any idea of withdrawal. Consequently, the 272d Infantry Regiment fought under heavy pressure throughout the day. During the afternoon and evening, while the Soviet 63d and 144th Rifle Divisions approached the outskirts of Yehho, other Soviet divisions pressured the Japanese from north and south of the main road.

The 97th and 371st Rifle Divisions struck the southern flank of the Japanese 272d Infantry Regiment, while the 215th and 277th Rifle Divisions attacked the left flank of the 271st Infantry Regiment. Simultaneously, the 190th and 157th Rifle Divisions frontally assaulted the 272d Infantry Regiment's positions with concentrated artillery support. Early the next day, the Soviet 190th Rifle Division attacked the Japanese left sector (273d Infantry Regiment) while the 97th and 371st Rifle Divisions launched offensives against the central sector from the south, forcing the 272d Infantry Regiment to withdraw to the southern foothills of Mount Shozu. At 0900, General Shiina again moved his command post, this time ten kilometers to the rear of Mount Shozu. Shortly thereafter, Soviet rocket and artillery fire almost obliterated the top of Mount Shozu. A coordinated Soviet assault on the summit, covered by intense artillery fire, finally overwhelmed the stubborn Japanese defenders. The commanders of the 20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment and the Mutanchiang Heavy Artillery Regiment and most of their men were killed by the onslaught, and their guns destroyed.³⁰ General Shiina lost communications with his remaining units. His last formal order to his units read:

All personnel of the division, with firm determination to die in honor, shall repeatedly carry out raiding tactics under cover of darkness, and will smash the enemy's combat strength bit by bit. To this end all units will carry out tenacious attacks, according to the following procedures:

The main target of attack will be the enemy located along the Mutanchiang road.

Units north of the road will charge and break through the enemy line to the south; those south of the road will charge and break through to the north. Each will advance to the hilly zone of the opposite side. In the daytime they will endeavor to seek cover and conceal their movements and intentions as much as possible. During the ensuing night they will return and repeat the same action.

In attacking, adjoining units will maintain close contact and exercise utmost care to avoid engagements among themselves.

Movement towards the sector west of Taimakou will be prohibited.

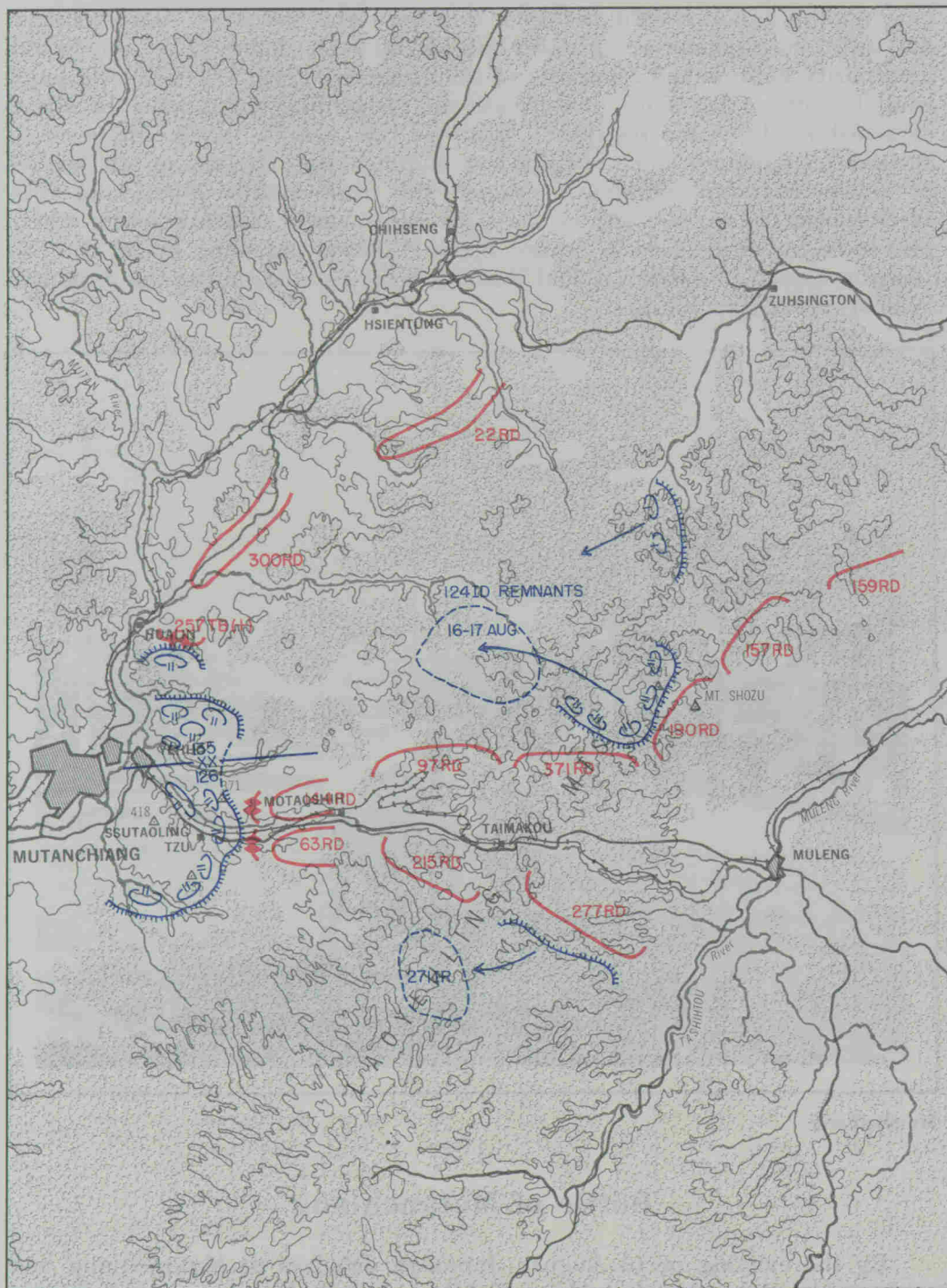
The raiding tactics stipulated in these instructions will be carried out beginning on the night of 15 August.³¹

Organized resistance by the 124th Infantry Division sputtered out after the night of the fourteenth. Thereafter, the unit could only harass Soviet columns marching westward toward Mutanchiang and keep Soviet divisions occupied with security and clearing operations north and south of the road. After receiving, by radio, word of the Imperial cease-fire, the remnants of the division, still under General Shiina's supervision, on the night of the fifteenth ceased raiding operations and tried to withdraw to the southwest. After a lengthy assembly period, at 0300 on the eighteenth, the division broke through the endless columns of Soviet troops, trucks, and tanks on the highway between Taimakou and Motaoshih. Separate groups of Japanese continued to cross the road during the next evening as well. Then the division moved through the mountains toward the Ningan area, where, on 22 August, after the Kwantung Army's surrender, it, too, surrendered to Soviet forces.

After the collapse of the 124th Infantry Division's resistance, Soviet 5th Army units secured their lines of communication (see map 4—6). They also redeployed sufficient forces to penetrate Japanese defenses east of Mutanchiang in coordination with 1st Red Banner Army's attack on Mutanchiang from the north. The 144th Rifle Division, 65th Rifle Corps (reinforced by the 218th Tank Brigade and 395th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment), and the 63d Rifle Division, 72d Rifle Corps (with the 210th Tank Brigade and 479th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment), continued to fight against the Japanese defenses east of Mutanchiang. The 97th, 371st, and 190th Rifle Divisions of the 65th Rifle Corps battled with remnants of the 124th Infantry Division north of the Muleng-Mutanchiang road. The 215th and the 277th Rifle Divisions of the 72d Rifle Corps advanced against remnants of the Japanese 271st Infantry Regiment south of the road.

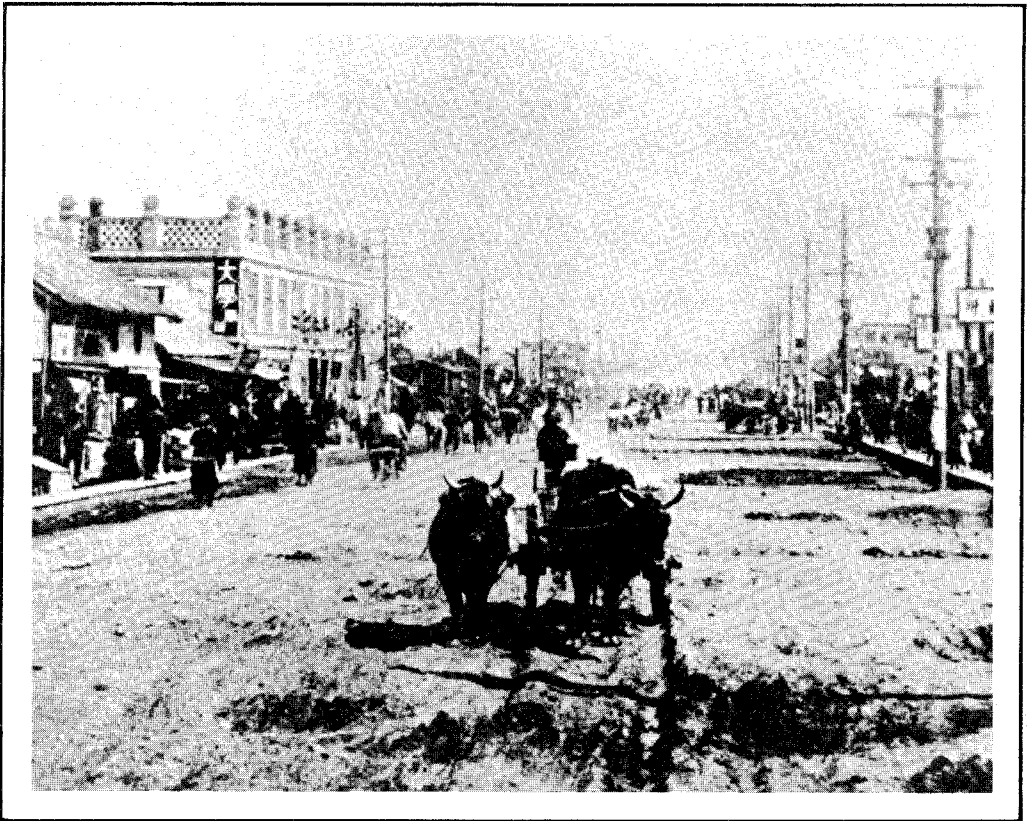
The 215th Rifle Division operated ten kilometers southwest of Motaoshih Station; the 277th Rifle Division, twenty-five kilometers southwest of Muleng. The 45th Rifle Corps, together with the 159th Rifle Division, covered the right flank of the army from Machiacho to Hsiachengtsu, while the 157th and 184th Rifle Divisions marched forward on the road from Suiyang. On the morning of 15 August, the 84th Cavalry (horse) Division, in front reserve at Muleng, received orders to advance into the mountains southwest of Muleng, then along the Tashihtou Valley, and through the Laoyehling Mountains toward Ningan. A separate detachment of the division, with a small number of tanks, traveled south of Muleng to establish contact with 25th Army at Taipenchang.³²

By 15 August, Soviet 5th Army had crossed the Laoyehling Mountains and had crushed the Japanese 124th Infantry Division, denying the Japanese the opportunity they had expected to conduct an orderly withdrawal to Mutanchiang. In doing so, however, the distance the army had traveled, the terrain over which it fought, and the resistance of the 124th Infantry



Map 4-6. Situation, 14 August

Division all prevented the Soviets from bringing overwhelming power to bear on the Japanese Mutanchiang defenses. The 5th Army was stretched out over 100 kilometers, with the bulk of its force deployed on the flanks as security against the remnants of the Japanese 124th Division. Although lead elements of 5th Army had crossed the Laoyehling Mountains well ahead of schedule, Japanese resistance scattered 5th Army's forces. Moreover, a substantial Japanese force remained at Mutanchiang. Because of 5th Army's problems, Marshal Meretskov ordered the front mobile group, the 10th Mechanized Corps, to fight in the 25th Army sector, further south, where prospects for early success looked better.³³ These decisions made, the 5th Army prepared to assist 1st Red Banner Army in overcoming the Japanese defenses at Mutanchiang.



Mutanchiang

Battle of Mutanchiang

By the evening of 13 August, Japanese defenses at Mutanchiang had coalesced to the point that Major Takikawa's battalion temporarily halted Soviet units of 1st Red Banner Army at Hualin (see map 4—6). Meanwhile, Soviet 5th Army forces, having overcome the Motaoshih defense, approached

the eastern defenses of Mutanchiang. The Japanese 126th and 135th Infantry Divisions deployed in accordance with a 5th Army order issued at 1200 on 11 August, calling for the 126th to occupy positions east and southeast of the city, with three regiments on line.³⁴ The 277th Infantry Regiment (minus two battalions) dug in south of Yingchitun, facing south. The 278th (minus one battalion) occupied a hill south of the freight depot, facing southeast, and the 279th (minus one battalion) occupied Ssutaoling and Hill 371 north of the highway, with its forces facing eastward. The division artillery regiment, with one heavy field artillery battery, deployed west of Ssutaoling, to cover with fire the approaches to Ssutaoling and Hill 371. Men from the combined raiding battalions of the 126th and 135th Infantry Divisions deployed in foxholes along the road from Ssutaoling to Yehho. Their mission was to interdict Soviet traffic. Almost all trenches were completed by the evening of the thirteenth.

The Japanese 135th Infantry Division occupied two sectors northeast of Mutanchiang and covered the approaches to Yehho from Hualin. Supported by a battalion of divisional artillery, the 370th Infantry Regiment (minus two battalions) defended the left sector. A battalion of the 369th Infantry Regiment, backed by one battalion of the 368th Infantry Regiment and a company of engineers, occupied the right sector. Major Takikawa's battalion, 370th Infantry Regiment, in an attempt to cover the 135th Infantry Division's construction of defenses farther to the rear, engaged the Soviet 257th Tank Brigade at Hualin. Firing and communications trenches had been finished by the evening of 13 August, but the positions were not totally connected. Furthermore, the Japanese lacked barbed wire and antitank obstacles and had only negligible artillery support. The 126th Division, for example, had twenty guns; the 135th, only ten. A handful of light tanks were available for support.

On the morning of 14 August, the 257th Tank Brigade of 1st Red Banner Army received reinforcements from 26th Rifle Corps (see map 4—6). Two self-propelled artillery battalions, acting as the forward detachments of the 300th Rifle Division and 22d Rifle Division (whose main elements were still en route from Tzuhsingtun), raced forward and joined the depleted 257th Tank Brigade. Lieutenant Colonel Anishchik then renewed his attacks on Hualin Station. The previous day's fighting had sapped Japanese strength and morale. Especially debilitating to Japanese morale was the Soviet ability, even during the night, to evacuate successfully tanks that had been damaged the previous day.^{*35}

On the afternoon of the fourteenth, repeated Soviet attacks against Major Takikawa's battalion drove the Japanese away from Hualin Station at a cost of three Soviet tanks. The Japanese, however, still held advanced positions north of Tzumeiholo.

*Throughout the campaign, the Soviets evacuated and repaired tanks quickly.

The right sector of the Japanese 135th Infantry Division defense was quiet throughout the fourteenth because General Beloborodov did not have enough forces to overwhelm the Japanese positions. Until such forces were available, his 1st Red Banner Army's leading elements could only nibble away at the Japanese defenses.

By the evening of the fourteenth, only the 257th Tank Brigade and the two self-propelled artillery battalions of the 22d and 300th Rifle Divisions had reached Hualin. The rifle regiments of the 300th and 22d Rifle Divisions remained strung out over the forty kilometers of road northeast to Tzuhsingtun, while other 26th Rifle Corps units busily constructed and maintained roads even farther to the rear. It was a similar tale for the 59th Rifle Corps, whose lead elements were approaching Chihsing, but whose divisions were also strung out far to the rear.

In addition, with such a limited force, 1st Red Banner Army could not maneuver against the Japanese because of the terrain obstacles. The composition of the Soviet force (primarily tanks and self-propelled guns) prevented maneuver off the roads into the marshy, boggy woods and fields. Because the Japanese also had destroyed the bridge spanning the Mutan River at Hualin, the Soviets could not cross the river until sufficient reinforcements were available to conduct an assault crossing. The only remaining bridge was at Yehho, still well behind the main Japanese defenses.

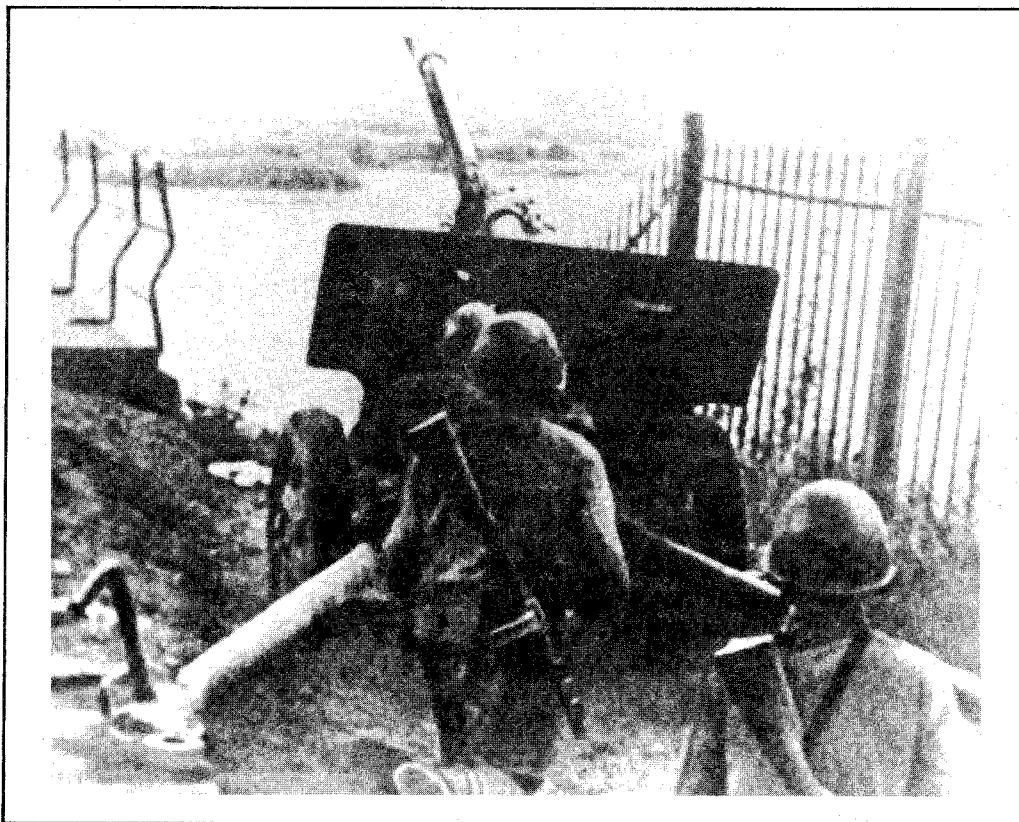
General Beloborodov ordered the 257th Tank Brigade to fix the Japanese defense, while his remaining forces closed on Hualin. Meanwhile, he planned to envelop Japanese defenses by developing operations on both sides of the river.

On the morning of 15 August, while the 257th Tank Brigade continued engaging the Japanese, the main force of the 300th and 22d Rifle Divisions and 77th Tank Brigade, along with the headquarters of General Skvortsev's 26th Rifle Corps, reached Hualin (see map 4—7). Skvortsev immediately prepared for a two-pronged offensive to commence on the afternoon of the fifteenth.³⁶

The 22d Rifle Division would force the Mutan River at Huashulintsin, ten kilometers north of Mutanchiang, and then strike the city from the northwest. Because of a lack of bridging equipment, no armor could accompany the 22d Rifle Division. The 300th Rifle Division and 257th Tank Brigade would attack the Japanese defenses along the Hualin-Yehho road shortly after noon.

The 1049th Rifle Regiment and the division's training battalion, supported by an SU-76 self-propelled gun battalion of the 22d Rifle Division, made the main thrust on the right flank in order to capture Tzumeiholo, attack across the Mutan River near Yehho, and then advance into eastern Mutanchiang. The 1051st Rifle Regiment, with a self-propelled battalion and

the 257th Tank Brigade, made a supporting attack on the left flank toward Yehho Station in order to cross the Mutan River near the recently destroyed bridge and then to advance into the southeastern portion of the city. The 52d Mortar Brigade and 54th Guards Mortar Regiment provided fire support. These combined attacks pushed Major Takikawa's battalion back to a stream north of Tzumeiholo, and the Soviets overran most of the battalion position, although not Takikawa's headquarters.



1st Red Banner Army artillery firing across the Mutanchiang River

A major battle erupted for remaining Japanese positions north of the stream and main Japanese defenses south of the stream.³⁷ The Soviet 77th Tank Brigade joined the battle in support of the 300th Rifle Division. From his command post, General Beloborodov did not like the slow progress he saw:

The report of General Skvortsev was not pleasing. On the main axis the division of Cherepanov [300th Rifle Division] advanced slowly. The road from Hualin Station to Yehho Station was mined, and tanks advanced with difficulty. All was not going well with the crossing of General Svirs' Division [22d Rifle Division] in the vicinity of the destroyed bridge. Thus, we decided Konstantin Petrovich Kazakov [Chief of Army Artillery] would remain here

and assist with the corps artillery, Maksim Nikolaevich Safonov [Chief of Engineer Forces] would go to the river crossing, and I would go to the 300th Rifle Division—to Cherepanov.

Fornilii Georgievich Cherepanov was in a difficult position. His division was striking the main blow, but his forces were small. The order said, "300th Rifle Division . . ." and so on. But in reality? One regiment was still on the march. The second regiment—of Mikhail Frolovich Buzhak—was deployed facing east to cover the division's left flank. It turns out that only the 1049th Rifle Regiment of Lieutenant Colonel Konstantin Vasil'evich Panin, with supporting tanks, attacked south towards Yehho.³⁸

Thus, the piecemeal Soviet attacks failed to achieve the overall objective. The 1st Red Banner Army had yet to establish contact with the 65th Rifle Corps of 5th Army, advancing on Yehho from the east. Until contact was made, the 300th Rifle Division would continue to have difficulty advancing.

Under heavy fire, General Beloborodov made his way to General Cherepanov's forward observation point, where he found the general seriously wounded. So Beloborodov put Colonel Lubiagin, the deputy corps commander, in charge and joined Lieutenant Colonel Panin at the command post of the 1049th Rifle Regiment, just north of Tzumeiholo. Beloborodov later described the price he paid for his advance toward Yehho Station:

The mountain road from Nan'chatsi south was literally crammed with *Smertniki* [Kamikazes]. There were groups of them even midst the minefields. The rifle battalions of Captains E. N. Baibus, D. I. Sindiashtin, and I. P. Artemenko advanced together with tanks; and our sappers fearlessly advanced forward creating paths through the mine fields under heavy artillery and machine gun fire of the enemy, simultaneously destroying *Smertniki* in hand to hand combat.³⁹

By nightfall on the fifteenth, lead elements of the 300th Rifle Division, 257th Tank Brigade, and 77th Tank Brigade had consolidated their gains along the stream north of Tzumeiholo, five kilometers short of their assigned objective. Beloborodov returned to his headquarters and learned that the 22d Rifle Division, less its artillery and heavy equipment, had successfully crossed the Mutan River. By evening, its lead regiments, the 211th and 246th Rifle Regiments, were only four to five kilometers north of Mutanchiang. The division's reconnaissance units had actually penetrated into the outskirts of the city, where Japanese defenses were very weak. The 22d Rifle Division, however, lacked artillery and tanks to exploit its momentary advantage. To support the division, Beloborodov decided to launch a coordinated attack on both sides of the river on the morning of 16 August. After a partial artillery preparation, the full 300th and 22d Rifle Divisions would attack, supported by additional armor and artillery units just arrived on the battlefield.

While 1st Red Banner Army forces struck southward from Hualin on 14 and 15 August, 5th Army continued to attack the eastern approaches to Mutanchiang (see map 4—6). By the evening of 13 August, the 144th Rifle Division (with the 218th Tank Brigade and 395th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment) and the 63d Rifle Division (with the 210th Tank Brigade and 479th Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment) were just two kilometers east of Ssutaoling and three kilometers southeast of Hill 371. The 144th Rifle Division deployed north of the road, and the 63d Rifle Division took positions south of the road. From these locations, an assault could be mounted upon the Japanese 279th Infantry Regiment's positions.

At 1100 on 14 August, Soviet artillery opened fire on Japanese artillery positions to the north of Ssutaoling Hill in order to neutralize Japanese batteries. Two hours later the Soviets shifted their concentrated fire to the hill itself. Elements of the 218th Tank Brigade, reinforced by infantry, then assaulted the 3d Battalion's (279th Infantry Regiment) field fortifications, which formed a salient southeast of Hill 371. By 1500 the Japanese defenders had been annihilated. Shortly thereafter, troops of the 144th Rifle Division occupied Hill 371, although during the night, they had to repulse several desperate Japanese counterattacks. Meanwhile, the 210th Tank Brigade and 63d Rifle Division contested the 279th Infantry Regiment's main forces for Ssutaoling Hill. Initial Soviet attempts to seize the hill failed, but after a four-hour artillery barrage had destroyed or disorganized Japanese positions on its summit, the Soviet 226th Rifle Regiment finally seized the crest.⁴⁰ By evening, Ssutaoling Hill was in Soviet hands, although Ssutaoling village remained Japanese. Japanese heavy artillery also shelled the Soviet hill positions, claiming the destruction of sixteen Soviet tanks. During the night, suicide squads from the 126th Infantry Division's raiding battalion attempted to breach Soviet defenses, but "because the enemy's [Soviet] security measures around his newly won positions were very effective," this attempt failed.⁴¹ A subsequent counterattack by the 279th Infantry Regiment also ended in failure.

On the night of 14 August, the Soviets consolidated their newly won positions on the heights for new attacks against the Japanese the next morning (see map 4—7). From 0800 to 1600 on the fifteenth, Soviet artillery and tanks blasted Japanese artillery positions, knocking out all but one of the twenty-four Japanese artillery pieces, as well as destroying all four Japanese tanks and antitank guns. During the fierce bombardment, the 63d Rifle Division renewed its attack, this time striking the 278th Infantry Regiment south of Ssutaoling. The 63d forced the Japanese regiment to withdraw and cut its communications with division headquarters. Soviet tanks also reached 126th Infantry Division headquarters, where "a squad of firemen from the transport unit, each armed with a 15 kilogram explosive, attacked the leading five tanks in a suicide charge, one tank per man, and successfully demolished all five tanks."⁴² Shaken, the Soviet 210th Tank Brigade withdrew to Ssutaoling to regroup. With Soviet tanks attacking division headquarters and with all divisional artillery destroyed, the 126th

Division commander consulted his chief of staff and, at 1800, ordered his division to prepare for a "final charge."⁴³ In early evening, however, a lull descended over the battlefield, enabling the Japanese to postpone such a desperate measure.

The unexpectedly strong resistance of the Japanese 126th Division east of Mutanchiang caused Marshal Meretskov to amend 5th Army's mission. Rather than battering itself against Mutanchiang, the army would sidestep the city to the south, leaving only a portion of its force to cooperate with 1st Red Banner Army and reduce the fanatic Japanese defense of the city. Orders issued at 1645 on 15 August accordingly directed 5th Army to turn the Japanese south flank and advance via Ningan to Kirin and Changchun.⁴⁴ A strong forward detachment of the 210th and 218th Tank Brigades of 5th Army led the advance.

On the morning of the sixteenth, the 65th Rifle Corps attacked Mutanchiang from the east and southeast, while the 26th Rifle Corps, 1st Red Banner Army, attacked from the northwest and northeast. The 26th Rifle Corps was to secure Yehho and put its infantry across the Mutan River into Mutanchiang. After clearing Yehho, the 257th and 77th Tank Brigades, attached to the 26th Rifle Corps, were to continue southwestward to provide armor support for 65th Rifle Corps, 5th Army.

Meanwhile, General Beloborodov completed his dispositions for a final assault on Japanese 135th Infantry Division positions, set for 0700 on the sixteenth.⁴⁶ East of the Mutan River, the 300th Rifle Division, supported by the 257th and 77th Tank Brigades, would advance to Yehho. The 1049th Rifle Regiment would advance on the right flank, the 1051st Rifle Regiment on the left. The 1053d Rifle Regiment in second echelon would attempt to cross the Mutan River north of Yehho. On the west bank of the Mutan River the 22d Rifle Division, after having consolidated its forces during the night, would attack Mutanchiang from the north and northwest, with the 246th and 211th Rifle Regiments in division first echelon.

Facing impending disaster, Japanese 5th Army reassessed its forces. The day before, First Area Army commander, Gen. Kita Seiichi had authorized 5th Army to withdraw to Tunhua or Hengtaohotzu, if its position at Mutanchiang became untenable.⁴⁷ With the situation rapidly deteriorating, Lt. Gen. Noritsume Shimizu, 5th Army commander, issued orders at 1200 on 15 August to begin a general withdrawal to Hengtaohotzu after midnight.⁴⁸

According to the plan, the 126th Infantry Division would move back on the road south of Yehho, across the Mutan River, to positions west of the city. The 135th Infantry Division would withdraw north of Yehho across the Mutan River to positions northwest of the city. The Shihtou Reserve Officers Candidate Unit would cover the withdrawal from its positions east of Yehho to the hills south of the main road from Muleng. Although orders

from the two divisions to all subordinate units echoed the substance of the withdrawal orders, those units were still engaged in heavy contact and never received such orders. So the 278th Infantry Regiment, 126th Infantry Division, and Major Takikawa's battalion, 135th Infantry Division, were left to fend for themselves against the Soviet offensive.

The 126th Infantry Division withdrew at 2300 on 15 August, and by 0800, all units except the isolated 278th Infantry Regiment had crossed the Hsingling bridge. The 135th Infantry Division had withdrawn by dawn, leaving only Takikawa's battalion to resist the Soviet advance.

At 0700 on 16 August, the final Soviet assault on Mutanchiang⁴⁹ smashed through Takikawa's battalion defenses, and the 300th Rifle Division and 257th and 77th Tank Brigades moved on Yehho Station. Rocket artillery volleys struck the Japanese rear areas and ignited ammunition warehouses. The few survivors of the Takikawa Battalion straggled from the battlefield in groups of two's and three's. By 0900 Lieutenant Colonel Panin's 1049th Rifle Regiment had secured Yehho Station. The 77th Tank Brigade's tanks raced toward the Mutan River bridge, only to find the bridge in ruins. Because the Japanese had destroyed all three bridges, Beloborodov ordered his two tank brigades to attack south along the east bank of the river, while his infantry prepared to cross the river by rafts, logs, small boats, and other improvised means. These attempts by the 1051st Rifle Regiment to cross the river were unsuccessful because of Japanese artillery and small arms fire from the far bank.

Also at 0900, the 22d Rifle Division plunged into Mutanchiang from the northwest. After having completed their final concentration in jumping-off positions at 0600, the 211th Rifle Regiment, 22d Rifle Division, began its attack at 0900, entered Mutanchiang from the northwest, and reached the railroad station. This attack surprised the Japanese rear elements defending the Mutan River and forced their withdrawal. At 0920, the 246th Rifle Regiment entered the northern side of the city along the rail line. Soon all three regiments of Colonel Lubiagin's 300th Rifle Division had crossed the river and were into the city. Using fishing boats, the 1049th Rifle Regiment also crossed the Mutan River at 1100, while farther north the second echelon of the 1053d Rifle Regiment crossed on improvised rafts south of Tzumeiholo. Shortly thereafter, Lieutenant Colonel Buzhak's 1051st Rifle Regiment crossed the river south of the 1049th Rifle Regiment.

By 1300, the Japanese rear guard had abandoned the city under pressure from the east by the 1049th Rifle Regiment, from the south by the 1051st Rifle Regiment, and from the northwest by the 211th Rifle Regiment. Scattered groups of diehard Japanese fought to the end in cellars and basements of demolished buildings within the city. The 300th Rifle Division cleared the southwestern part of the city by late afternoon, while the 22d Rifle Division took all day to reach the western side of the city.

As the 300th Rifle Division crossed the Mutan River into the city, the 257th and 77th Tank Brigades moved south and joined the 144th Rifle Division of 65th Rifle Corps (5th Army). Together these units secured Yehhoshan (three kilometers south of Mutanchiang) and seized an undestroyed bridge, which provided passage into the southeastern sector of Mutanchiang. At 1000 on 16 August, Maj. Gen. Perekrestov's 65th Rifle Corps, 5th Army, completed the destruction of Japanese units east and southeast of Yehho, as his units enveloped and destroyed the Japanese 278th Infantry Regiment. By 1200 the survivors of the regiment had assembled under the regimental colors:

The regimental commander, Colonel Hajima Yamanaka respectfully bowed to the east, burned the regimental colors, rallied the assembled men, and led a last charge toward the south. Then together with Major Ueda, the 3rd Battalion Commander, he committed hara-kiri in the presence of the enemy.⁵⁰

Conclusions

The battle for Mutanchiang ended with the 278th Infantry Regiment's destruction and the withdrawal of Japanese covering units from the city. Japanese forces, harassed by Soviet frontal aviation, withdrew to Hengtaohotzu. The 1st Red Banner Army consolidated its forces to strike westward toward Harbin, while 5th Army turned south toward Ningnan and Kirin.

During the four days of combat, three Japanese divisions were forced back 150—180 kilometers and suffered heavy casualties. The speed of the Soviet advance, in particular that of 1st Red Banner Army, disrupted the original Japanese plans to defend from a main line of resistance well east of Mutanchiang. It also caused the Japanese to fragment their forces because they had to leave behind detachments to cover the withdrawal of their main elements. The Soviets consistently mangled and then bypassed these detachments. The Japanese divisions ultimately found themselves defending at Mutanchiang, in considerably reduced strength, along truncated defensive positions.

The only Japanese division that managed to occupy its main line of resistance (the 124th) was crushed as soon as the Soviets could muster sufficient forces against it. Although the speed of the Soviet advance allowed rapid movement forward and preempted the Japanese forward defenses, it also eroded the combat strength of Soviet forward units. Hence, by the time 1st Red Banner Army arrived at Mutanchiang, General Beloborodov lamented the limited strength of those elements available on the battlefield.

On 13 and 14 August, for instance, the Soviets had only a reinforced tank brigade available to battle the Japanese, the major reason the Japanese halted the brigade at Hualin. On the fifteenth, only three or four rifle regiments and a tank brigade were available for combat, again a force insufficient to overcome determined Japanese defenses. Only on the sixteenth

could Beloborodov muster sufficient strength to overcome the Japanese defenses. By that time the Japanese already had withdrawn major portions of their troops. A similar situation occurred in Soviet 5th Army sector. Although lead units of 5th Army reached the approaches to Mutanchiang on the evening of the thirteenth, the bulk of the army's strength remained on the flanks of the penetration or strung out to the rear, desperately trying to catch up with the vanguard of the army. Only by the evening of the fifteenth were sufficient Soviet 5th Army forces at hand to break the Japanese defenses and continue the drive southwest toward Ningan.

Despite these limitations, Japanese forces suffered heavy casualties. The 126th Infantry Division admitted 2,050 killed; the 135th, 3,000 killed; and 5th Army reported total casualties of 20,000 men out of 60,000 engaged, plus the loss of eighty-six guns and eighteen mortars. First Area Army acknowledged another 5,000 battlefield casualties from its engaged units.⁵¹ These figures appear more realistic than Soviet claims of 40,000 Japanese dead at Mutanchiang alone.⁵² Both Japanese 5th Army and First Area Army claimed to have inflicted 7,000—10,000 Soviet casualties.⁵³ The Japanese might have underestimated the damage they inflicted in light of Soviet reports of 32,000 dead in the entire campaign.⁵⁴ A large portion of the Soviet casualties occurred in the bitter fighting for Mutanchiang.

Despite the tenacious Japanese defense and the hindering terrain of Manchuria, Soviet forces accomplished their objectives ahead of schedule. They preempted Japanese attempts to create a strong contiguous defensive line around Mutanchiang and secured Mutanchiang eight days into the offensive, ten days ahead of schedule. Soviet success was the result of audacious and rapid advance over terrain the Japanese thought impassable. That rapid advance never lost momentum and almost paralyzed the Japanese command structure. The Japanese military's only consolation was the determined, even suicidal, discipline of units that followed orders unhesitatingly and sacrificed themselves for what was already a lost cause.

Notes

1. Complete Japanese 5th Army plans appear in JM 154, 181—83.
2. JM 154, 288—89.
3. Ibid., 200.
4. Ibid., 199.
5. Ibid., 260, 263.
6. Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 42.
7. Ibid., 43; JM 154, 286.
8. Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 43—44, 49—50.
9. Ibid., 50.
10. Ibid.
11. JM 154, 260, 199.

12. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46.
13. JM 154, 199, 260—61.
14. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46.
15. JM 154, 207, 292—94.
16. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46.
17. JM 154, 193.
18. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 218; Krupchenko, *Sovetskie*, 322, claims the 257th Tank Brigade lost six tanks destroyed and thirty-five men killed on 13 August. More detailed accounts of the day's action at Hualin are in Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 45—48, and Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46—47.
19. JM 154, 200—201, 278, 297—99.
20. Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 46; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 218.
21. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46.
22. JM 154, 235, map 2, map 4.
23. Ibid., 190, 195, map 4.
24. Ezhakov, "Boevoe primeneniye," 80; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 220.
25. Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 443—44; JM 154, 236—38.
26. JM 154, 196—97, map 4.
27. For impressions of the fighting, see Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 220—21; JM 154, 195—97, 236—38.
28. JM 154, 204—5.
29. Ibid., 236.
30. Ibid., 238—39; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 446; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 256—57.
31. JM 154, 240.
32. The 5th Army dispositions on 15 August are from Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 256—57; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 446.
33. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 221—22.
34. JM 154, 202—4, 263—66, map 1.
35. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 46—47; JM 154, 293—95, map 1.
36. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 48; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 253; Timofeev, "300-ia," 53—54.
37. JM 154, 208, 286—97.
38. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 48.
39. Ibid., 48—49.
40. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 224—54; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 446; JM 154, 205—6, 266—68.
41. JM 154, 268.
42. Ibid., 269.
43. Ibid., 270.
44. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 255.
45. Ibid., 259.
46. The 1st Red Banner Army plan details appear in Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 68—69; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 256; the 300th Rifle Division plan, in Timofeev, "300-ia," 53—54.
47. JM 154, 67, 210.

48. Ibid., 211.
49. Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 69—72; Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 48—51; Timofeev, "300-ia," 54—55; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 258—59; Krylov, *Navstrechu*, 447.
50. JM 154, 272—73.
51. Ibid., 69, 215, 273, 302. Various portions of this source cite total casualties in the campaign, the majority of which were suffered at Mutanchiang.
52. *IVMV*, 2:244.
53. JM 154, 69, 215.
54. I. Bagramian, ed., *Istoriia vojn i voennogo iskusstva* [History of war and military art] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1970), 353.

